

## **How Local Ordinance Language Can Slow the Need for Water and Wastewater Treatment Plant Expansion and Expedite Environmental Reviews and Permitting**

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Current natural resource and regulatory constraints require innovations in treated water and wastewater use, distribution, and treatment. By modifying local ordinance language to demonstrate forethought and planning, municipalities and counties can slow the need to increase treatment and delivery capacity, while expediting environmental review, approval, and permitting. Local jurisdictions need to demonstrate that they are doing all that they can to maximize efficiency and minimize consumptive use. Eliminating the delivery of finished water for irrigation is very effective. Providing reclaimed water for irrigation drastically reduces finished water consumption and treated wastewater outfall volumes. Costs associated with installation of reuse lines can be offset by reductions in capacity expansion volume and timing, as well as rate reductions. It's a win-win for utilities and consumers. Promoting the use of stormwater collection systems for irrigation is also a useful way for localities to demonstrate water resource efficiency and foresight. Reducing both consumptive need and pollutant loading into surface waters goes a long way to address agency concerns for both water use efficiency and secondary and cumulative impacts to water quality. Ordinance language should:

- Reduce and/or eliminate finished water in irrigation systems
- Promote use of reclaimed water
- Emphasize stormwater capture, reuse, and management
- Protect riparian and drainage way buffers and floodplains
- Maximize open space
- Support Low Impact Development

Incorporating thoughtful designs and appropriate ordinance language early in the environmental review process is invaluable. Scoping and pre-scoping are the most important first steps. While not required, the absence of serious inter-agency involvement early in the process dooms projects to regulatory review, negotiation, and permitting limbo. Holding a detailed pre-scoping meeting with representatives from all involved review agencies is an important component that is often overlooked. Using the formal scoping letter to provide responses to pre-scoping questions and summarize design methods demonstrates that the project is being planned, designed, and executed in a way that is best not only for the proponent and members of the service area, but the region's natural resources. Too often "canned" scoping letters receive "canned" responses. Addressing agency concerns at the front end and starting dialogue and negotiation early significantly expedites the process. DENR's recently published Guidance for Preparing SEPA Documents and Addressing Secondary and Cumulative Impacts has formally leveled the playing field in North Carolina. "What if they decide to go somewhere else because they don't have these restrictions" is now a moot point.